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of Engineers** ®

Walla Walla District  
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# News Release

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## Corps smolt barge releases load early as protective measure

**Walla Walla, Wash., --** The barge ride for nearly 360,000 juvenile salmon and steelhead was cut short early Saturday morning upstream from Ice Harbor Dam. The fish were being delivered down the Snake and Columbia Rivers, for release below Bonneville Dam, according to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials here.

The biological technician traveling with the load aboard the barge reported having difficulties controlling the water levels, due to some type of blockage in the barge's overflow drain screens. He made a decision, in accordance with existing procedures, and released the fish to prevent a major problem in the barge.

"We're really pleased that our biological technician took prompt and appropriate action as we train or brief those experts to do. On-duty and on-call officials were able to coordinate quickly with other key federal organizations involved with fish and dams and water to make arrangements to spill water to pass the smolts downstream," Hurson said.

Shortly after the biotech released the smolts from the barge, Hurson and other officials at the Corps' Northwestern Division Reservoir Control Center in Portland, Ore. contacted the Bonneville Power Administration to make arrangements to spill water at Ice Harbor Dam for six hours to help pass the released fish. At about 4 a.m., Saturday, the operator on duty began spilling approximately 40,000 cubic feet of water per second over the dam to move the juveniles downstream.

The technician was being very protective of the young fish in the holds of one of the Corps' fleet of eight juvenile fish transportation barges. This is the first time Hurson says he recalls experiencing this type of equipment problem that resulted in an early release in the more than 20 years the District has been transporting fish.

"We've delivered hundreds of millions of juvenile salmon and steelhead safely to release points below Bonneville Dam over the years with few problems," Hurson said. "Now, we're going to do all we can to find the cause of this situation so we can try to prevent it in the future."

The smolts in the involved barge had been collected at Lower Granite Dam near Pomeroy, Wash. A second barge being pushed downstream with the first was loaded with other young salmon and steelhead loaded at Little Goose Dam near Starbuck, Wash., and Lower Monumental Dam, near Kahlotus, Wash. The unaffected barge made a normal release below Bonneville Dam, near Cascade Locks, Ore., late Saturday evening.

The emptied barge was left at Ice Harbor Saturday and returned up the Snake River to Lower Granite Dam to be inspected Sunday, while the second barge continued downstream. Maintenance specialists and biologists are investigating the cause of the problem.

"The Army Corps of Engineers is committed to doing everything we can for these juvenile salmon and steelhead," said Hurson. "We will continue to look into this, but I think the training of our people kicked in and we did what was best for the fish."

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